

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This chapter discussed the background of the research, questions and purposes, significance, research scope, conceptual framework, and previous studies.

A. Background Study

The purpose of this study is to explore the knowledge and experiences of pre-service teachers regarding icebreakers as a strategy to engage students and manage the classroom. Icebreakers are not a new concept; they are recognised as one of the strategies to refocus children's concentration, build interaction between teachers and students (Jatmiko, 2019), and even engage students in learning (Dickinson et al., 2021).

Successful learning depends on students' active involvement in classroom activities. This is particularly important in English language teaching, where teachers must select appropriate learning media, materials, and strategies and maintain a conducive classroom environment (Rahmatullah, 2022). Since the quality of teaching depends on the teacher's ability to employ effective strategies (Murniati et al., 2022), fostering meaningful interactions between teachers and students is crucial. According to Flanders (1970), positive classroom dynamics are reflected in these interactions (between teachers and students), highlighting the need for strategies, such as structured engagement strategies that encourage participation and motivation.

However, pre-service teachers often face challenges when implementing strategies effectively in a real education classroom. Johnson (2018) stated that their classroom management methods, such as direct communication, rewards, and interactive activities, can vary based on their training and experience. Ice-breaker activities, in particular, balance authority with approachability, creating a positive tone for classroom learning (Marzano et al., 2005). Building strong

classroom management skills, including implementing these activities effectively, is vital for new teachers. Lestari (2023) highlights that pre-service teachers who establish an engaging atmosphere while maintaining discipline often achieve better learning outcomes.

An icebreaker is known as one strategy to solve this problem. it refreshes the brain, allowing students to refocus on the lesson. This can make students excited and re-concentrate during the learning process. Ice-breaking can be used as a warm-up activity at the beginning, as a temporary break during learning, or even as a closing activity. Icebreakers create a fun atmosphere and provide meaning and relevance to the subject matter being delivered. Therefore, every English teacher or pre-service teacher must be skilful in preparing icebreakers (Aniuranti et al., 2021).

Icebreakers are more than just warm-up activities in the EFL classroom, where they are important strategies to reduce affective barriers and establish a communicative atmosphere (Derakhshan et al., 2022). Recent research has shown that EFL learners often experience increased anxiety when practising oral skills, which can hinder language acquisition (Arabai, 2021). Icebreakers address this by providing opportunities to engage with low stakes, along with Dewaele and Li's (2021) finding that good emotional experiences are directly related to improved foreign language proficiency.

Despite the recognised importance of icebreaker activities, studies examining their use by pre-service teachers during teaching practicums remain limited. For example, an article written by Emi et al., entitled 'The Efficacy of Ice-Breaking Activities in Enhancing Students' Motivation for English Language Acquisition' (2024), focuses on proving that implementing icebreakers significantly enhanced students' interest and excitement for learning, through interviews with teachers and students. The following article is 'Breaking The Ice in The Classroom: Using Ice-Breaking in the Teaching and Learning Process' by Fitria (2023). It differs from previous research in that it focuses more on teachers choosing the right

icebreaker to engage students. Furthermore, the researcher found a study by John et al. entitled 'An Exploration of Icebreakers and Their Impact on Student Engagement in the Classroom' (2023), which focuses on the study of icebreakers and their effect on student engagement.

Although previous research (Emi et al., 2024; Fitria, 2023; John et al., 2023) has explored the efficacy, selection, and general impact of icebreakers in classrooms, the focus has been primarily on pre-service teachers or student learning outcomes, leaving a gap in understanding the experiences of pre-service teachers. In particular, there is a paucity of research examining pre-service teachers', especially English language education majors', prior knowledge of icebreakers, their perceptions of how these activities enhance engagement, or the challenges they face during the practicum.

This study addresses that gap by investigating the perspectives of pre-service teachers. It aims to uncover how they perceive icebreakers as an engagement strategy and what barriers hinder their use in practicum. The findings are expected to provide new insights for teacher training programmes, highlighting the role of icebreakers in initial teaching practice and bridging the gap between theory and practice for future educators.

B. Research Questions

This research is intended to answer the following three questions:

1. What are the personal narratives that pre-service teachers tell about their past encounters with icebreakers?
2. How do pre-service teachers narrate their experience of using icebreakers?
3. What are the stories pre-service teachers tell about the challenges they have faced when implementing icebreaker activities in the EFL classroom?

C. Research Purposes

This research has several objectives as follows:

1. To explore the personal narratives of pre-service teachers regarding their past encounters with icebreakers.
2. To examine how pre-service teachers narrate their experiences of using icebreakers in the classroom.
3. To investigate how the pre-service teachers face the challenges through ice-breaker activities.

D. Research Significances

The results of this study are expected to provide practical benefits as follows:

1. Theoretical Significance

This study contributes to the development of an understanding of the use of ice-breaking activities in educational settings, particularly from the perspective of pre-service teachers. The research aims to fill a gap in the literature regarding their practical application by exploring how these activities can enhance classroom management and foster student engagement. Additionally, the study addresses the limited research on pre-service teachers' experiences with ice-breaking activities during teaching practicums, highlighting the need for targeted training programs. Furthermore, it hopes for future studies on the long-term effects of ice-breaking activities on student learning outcomes and effective teaching practices, enriching the educational landscape and contributing to classroom management, student engagement, and teacher training.

2. Practical Significance

- a. For Pre-Service Teachers: The findings help pre-service teachers better understand powerful ice-breaker activities that engage students and create a positive learning environment.
- b. For Researcher and Readers: The findings provide researchers and readers with pre-service teachers' insights into how the pre-service teachers know about ice breakers theoretically and practically.

E. Research Scope

This study focuses on two pre-service teachers who taught seventh-grade students at junior high schools to explore and investigate their experiences in using icebreakers as classroom management tools during their practicum. By exploring pre-service teachers' perspectives of these activities, this study aims to provide insight into the practical implications of engaging students and why they choose ice breakers to achieve student engagement. The student engagement highlighted in this study is the emotional and behavioural engagement of students when implementing ice breakers before or in the middle of a lesson or in the last of a learning process. This research also aims to identify the challenges that pre-service teachers face when implementing ice-breaking activities and to examine how they overcome these challenges during the practicum.

The research is limited to pre-service teachers from the English Education Department, primarily from UIN Sunan Gunung Djati, who utilize icebreakers and implement their practicum in 7th grade junior high schools. The pre-service teachers in those schools were chosen based on how they used icebreakers during teaching test practice.

F. Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework of this study was designed to support the elements in this research. By integrating theories related to management classroom, student engagement, and the teacher as a facilitator, this study aims to explain how pre-service teachers' prior knowledge of ice-breaking activities fosters a supportive and interactive learning atmosphere.

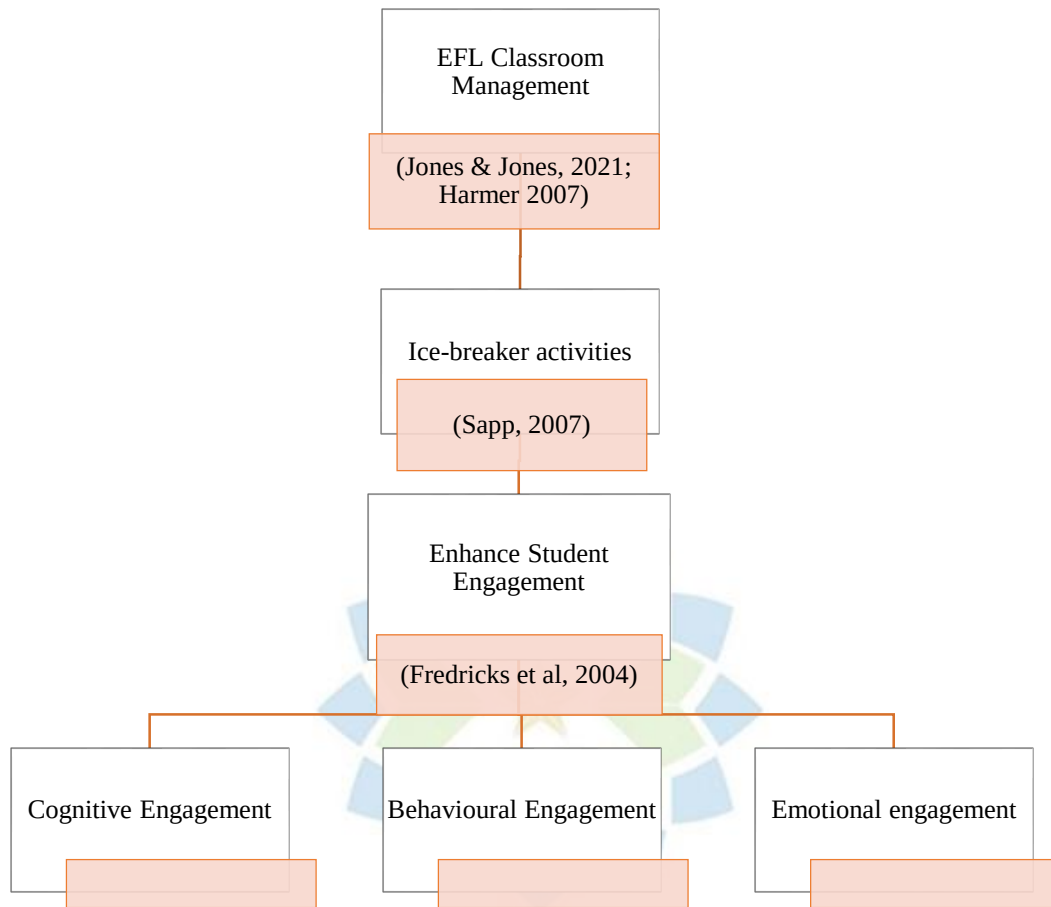


Figure 1.1 Conceptual Framework

In addition, Jones & Jones's (2021) classroom management theory for this research frames icebreakers as a strategy to maintain engagement and order. Key principles such as smooth transitions, group focus, and witnessing (teacher awareness) align with effective ice-breaker implementation. A well-managed classroom allows smoother transitions between activities, including ice-breaker exercises, and fosters students' sense of safety and belonging (Emmer & Evertson, 2013).

Active participation and engagement from students play a vital role in the classroom (Ward, 2021). Fredricks et al. (2004, p. 61) theorized that there are three types of student engagement in the classroom: behavioral, emotional, and cognitive. Behavioural engagement refers to students' active involvement in the

classroom learning process. Their participation in various activities and tasks assigned during lessons demonstrates this type of engagement. On the other hand, emotional engagement is associated with the motivation and enthusiasm students display when participating in learning activities. It reflects their emotional connection and interest in the learning process. These two can be realised by an Ice-breaker, which it provide students with a chance to interact with each other, not only with students but also with the teacher. Sapp (2007) states that the principle of icebreakers are simple, non-threatening, open-ended, relevant, and energizing.

Meanwhile, cognitive engagement focuses on students' ability to comprehend, analyze, and internalize the instructional material and process the material being taught. In the EFL classroom context, cognitively engaged foreign learners demonstrate curiosity, persistence, and a willingness to exert effort in mastering complex concepts, which contributes significantly to deep learning and long-term academic achievement (Fredricks et al., 2004). Related to the researcher mentioned before, this study focuses only on behavioural and emotional engagements.

Although ice-breaking activities have considerable potential, pre-service teachers often face challenges in their implementation. These challenges can include student resistance, time constraints, and difficulties aligning activities with curricular objectives. According to Novitasari and Murtafi'ah (2022), probationary teachers need to engage in reflective practice and seek feedback to refine their approach to overcome these obstacles. Lena et al. (2023, p. 242) also highlighted the importance of balancing creativity with structure, demonstrating that well-executed ice-breaking activities can significantly increase students' engagement both behaviorally and emotionally. This study aims to provide actionable insights to improve pedagogical practices and foster more engaging EFL classes by investigating the strategies, perspectives, and challenges pre-service teachers face in implementing ice-breaking activities.

G. Previous Study

Studies examining the icebreakers used by pre-service teachers during teaching practicums remain limited. For example, Ghifarah et al.'s (2023) article is 'Students' Perception towards The Role of Ice Breaking Activities in Learning English at Senior High School.' They explored students' perceptions of icebreakers in a high school setting, focusing on fun and motivation. In contrast, this study examined pre-service teachers' knowledge, challenges, and application of icebreakers during practicum. Moreover, this study was implemented in a junior high school.

The second is a study by Fitria (2023) titled "Breaking the Ice in the Classroom: Using Ice Breaking in The Teaching and Learning Process" that focuses on the concept of ice-breaking activities and their role in the teaching and learning process. Using a library research approach, this study comprehensively analyzes the preparation, planning, and execution required for practical ice-breaking activities. The research emphasizes the importance of aligning ice-breaking activities with students' needs and classroom conditions while adhering to core teaching principles. Unlike Fitria's study, which provides a general and theoretical discussion, this study investigates the practical application of ice-breaking activities by pre-service teachers. Additionally, this research seeks to uncover how ice-breaking activities influence student engagement behaviorally and emotionally, while addressing how pre-service teachers implement these strategies.

Furthermore, the researcher found research by John et al. (2023). This research is entitled 'An Exploration of Icebreakers and Their Impact on Student Engagement in the Classroom'. This study focuses on discovering how ice-breaking improves the English-speaking skills of Prathom students at Maitreechit Wittayathan School, Bangkok, Thailand. The results showed that the use of icebreakers improved English speaking skills based on the results of interviews with teachers, students, and participant observation. The gap with this study is that

they took school teachers as participants, while the researcher will take pre-service teachers as the main participants in this study, and it focuses on the speaking session. Meanwhile, the researcher will not specify one skill.

The last study, 'The Power of Ice Breaker Activity: Examining the Impact of Icebreakers on Student Participation and Engagement in the Classroom,' examined in-service teachers' use of icebreakers with Grade 11 students. In contrast, this study focused specifically on pre-service teachers' experiences during practicum. Unlike the study's summarized qualitative interviews and broad focus on "comfortable environments," my study specifically analyzed behavioral/emotional engagement in EFL classroom.

In conclusion, previous studies on icebreaker activities have primarily focused on students' perceptions (Ghifarah et al., 2023) or implementation by in-service teachers in a high school setting ("The Power of Icebreaker Activities"), leaving a gap in understanding preservice teachers' experiences during their practicum. While Fitria (2023) offers a theoretical analysis of icebreakers through desk research, and John et al. (2023) examines their impact on speaking skills in a specific Thai school context, my study shifts the focus to preservice teachers' practical implementation of icebreakers in a junior high school, with an emphasis on behavioral and emotional engagement rather than single-language speaking skills.

This study employs narrative inquiry to explore pre-service teachers' knowledge, perceptions, and challenges during their practicum. By focusing on pre-service teachers' practical experiences and linking icebreakers to engagement theory, this study provides actionable insights for teacher training programs, bridging the gap between theory and practice in a way that previous research has not.